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To the Editor,

Phantom Scenery

Although I must admit some personal scepticism towards the phenomena of phantom houses and scenery, I think M. H. Coleman (1998) may be premature in assuming the case of the phantom house reported at Bradfield St George, Suffolk, in 1926 to have been satisfactorily explained.

Although the references to past discussions in the *SPR Journal* cited by him (including Lambert, 1963, 1964) provide explanation for a number of cases of phantom scenery, the Bradfield St George case remains unexplained, in spite of further fieldwork that was undertaken by Tony Cornell at the time (Lambert, 1963, 1964).

Although Lambert (1963) notes that the two women who saw the house, a teacher named Ruth Wynne and her pupil Miss Allington, were both newcomers to the area, what has been overlooked is that Ruth Wynne continued to live in the same area, at the local Rectory, for a number of years. Her pupil Miss Allington also stayed in the area for four years, and from her own account, “got to know the country well”. Neither of the women ever succeeded in locating the house they saw again (Bennett, 1939).

The case was later researched by a resident of Bradfield St George, the late Mr Leonard Aves, who published a pamphlet on local history in 1978 (Aves & Aves, 1978), which can be found in the Records Office at Bury St Edmunds.

Leonard Aves was unable to find any local building which could have been the subject of a mistaken observation, and to date no one has yet come up with a suitable candidate of a property to explain the experience of Miss Wynne and Miss Allington.

Interviewed in the local newspaper, the *Bury Free Press*, in 1978, Leonard Aves was quoted as saying:—

I have considered that it might have been a mirage, but I have had some experiences of mirages and I believe this apparition too large to be encompassed in one. At least, I have never heard of a mirage that large in this country.

Furthermore, for it to have been a mirage would mean that there would have to have been such a house not too far away and we cannot find any traces of one within a reasonable radius. [Chapman, 1978]

Even more interestingly, Leonard Aves traced another alleged witness to a phantom house in the area. This man wrote under the *nom-de-plume* of 'James Cobbold' and his account was originally published in (of all places) *Amateur Gardening* (Cobbold, 1975).

James Cobbold claimed to have seen a phantom house with a garden in the company of a local butcher, a Mr George Waylett, in around June 1911 or 1912, at a spot along Kingshall Street between Bradfield St George and the village of Rougham Green. They were travelling by pony and trap when the air was filled with a swishing sound and turned very cold. The horse bolted, causing Mr Waylett to fall from the trap, but Cobbold hung on and managed to control the animal. As he did so he noticed:—

... a double-fronted red brick house roofed with pantiles, three-storeyed, of pronounced Georgian appearance.

As he was trying to control the terrified horse, he also noticed six flower beds all in bloom in front of the house. James Cobbold also claimed have seen the house disappear without explanation, for as he looked back:—

... a kind of mist seemed to envelop the house, which I could still see, and the whole thing simply disappeared, it just went.

According to Cobbold, Waylett also saw the house on this and other occasions, and Cobbold's grandfather, a Mr Palfrey, had also seen it in about June 1860 (Cobbold, 1975, quoted in Aves & Aves, 1978).

Leonard Aves subsequently contacted James Cobbold, resulting in Cobbold visiting him in early 1976. Together with a Captain D. Armstrong (RN) of Rougham, they went to a spot at which Cobbold stated he had seen the house. He identified it as being off Kingshall Street, which runs between Bradfield St George and Rougham, in a field, located nearly opposite a track called Gypsy Lane and "nearly in line with the northern end of Colville's Grove", a small wood (Aves & Aves, 1978).

Naturally, one would wish for more detailed accounts concerning a phantom house (not to mention living witnesses) but Leonard Aves was writing primarily as an amateur local historian and not as a psychical researcher. However, presuming these stories do relate to genuine experiences, the Bradfield St George case becomes even more difficult to explain.

It may also be of interest to know that rumours persist in the Rougham Green / Bradfield St George area of occasional appearances of a phantom house around Gypsy Lane, including a claim that it was seen about twenty years ago by the daughter of the last rector, who lived at the same property as Miss Wynne. She is reputed to have been alarmed by the appearance of the phantom house in front of her. She is recalled as "having run sobbing into the Bennett Arms pub and told her story, but nothing of the house could be found" (Mortlock, 1998).

Although I have yet to trace either this woman or any other first-hand witnesses, SPR members may be interested to learn that June continues to be considered the favoured month locally for a phantom house to put in an appearance.

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To the Editor,

In the April 1999 issue of the *Journal* (Vol 63, No. 855) John Randall refers to the reluctance to investigate phenomena which may occur in some religious context, and specifically mentions the case of grey mist being witnessed as "a cloud of God's presence", which in turn reminded him of Mollie Goldney's experience when with Rudi Schneider.

Admittedly, always wary of religious connections with what I see as a scientific study, I now wonder if a number of witnesses were present at the time of the appearance of the mist, or was the incident seen by only one person?

The symptoms of a slipped or slipping retina could well produce the same sort of 'phenomenon' surely? The 'fog' referred to by Mollie was "a rare occurrence" and although described by other investigators, seems always to be witnessed by only one at a time.

If this is, in fact, due to retina displacement, then, as suggested by Dr Eugene Osty, there could well be a link with telekinesis or PK, accepting that this can be produced at times of stress. To suffer the possible and sudden loss of one's eyesight is most certainly a period of considerable worry, believe me.

Another aspect which may dispose of this suggestion would be the photographs claiming to show 'energy clouds', 'spirit forms' or 'ectoplasmic rods', which to me merely illustrate a possible fault with the film or the photographer, or something yet to be identified. One such photo is to be published in my latest small paperback, *Haunted Kent Today* (SB Publications), showing a dowser near the altar of St Augustine's Abbey in Canterbury in 1998. The white (or grey?) mist on the side of the illustration was, he was told, "an energy force". Maybe it illustrates psychokinesis?

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